

International Nurses Day 2023 report



OUR NURSES. OUR FUTURE.

International Council of Nurses

**Featuring ICN's
new Charter for Change**

**Value, protect, respect and invest in our nurses
for a sustainable future for nursing and health care**

Acknowledgments

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ICN's Charter for Change

1

Protect and invest in the nursing profession to rebuild health systems that can deliver the Sustainable Development Goals and Universal Health Coverage to improve global health. Recognise and value health and health care as an investment not a cost. Secure commitments for investment to maintain equitable and people-centred care.

2

Urgently address and improve support for nurses' health and well-being by ensuring safe and healthy working conditions and respecting their rights. Put in place systems to ensure safe staffing levels. Ensure protections against violence and hazards in the workplace and implement and enforce international labour standards on the rights of nurses to work in safe and healthy supportive environments ensuring physical as well as mental health protections.

3

Advance strategies to recruit and retain nurses to address workforce shortages. Improve compensation for nurses to ensure fair and decent pay and benefits, and uphold positive practice environments that listen to nurses and provide them with the resources they need to do their jobs safely, effectively and efficiently. Fund professional governance, recognition and development activities across career trajectories.

4

Develop, implement and finance national nursing workforce plans with the objective of self-sufficiency in the supply of future nurses. Align resources to support a robust workforce to deliver essential health services, reverse unemployment and retain talent. When international migration takes place ensure it is ethical, transparent, monitored and delivers equal mutual benefits for sending and receiving countries as well as respecting the rights of individual nurses. Undertake system workforce planning and monitoring across the care continuum.

5

Invest in high-quality, accredited nursing education programmes to prepare more new nurses and advance career development for existing nurses. Design curricula so that nurses graduate with the right skills, competencies and confidence to respond to the changing and evolving health needs of communities and support career progression from generalist to specialist and advanced practice.

6

Enable nurses to work to their full scope of nursing practice by strengthening and modernizing regulation and investing in advanced nursing practice and nurse-led models of care. Reorientate and integrate health systems to public health, primary care health promotion and prevention, community, home-based and patient-centred care.

7

Recognise and value nurses' skills, knowledge, attributes and expertise. Respect and promote nurses' roles as health professionals, scientists, researchers, educators and leaders. Involve nurses in decision-making affecting health care at all levels. Promote and invest in an equitable culture that respects the nursing profession as leading contributors to high quality health systems.

8

Actively and meaningfully engage national nursing associations as critical professional partners in all aspects of health and social care policy, delivery and leadership as the experienced and trusted voice of nursing. Build local, national and global multilateral partnerships.

9

Protect vulnerable populations, uphold and respect human rights, gender equity and social justice. Place and uphold nursing ethics at the centre of health systems' design and delivery so all people can access health care that is equitable, non-discriminatory, people-centred and rights based, and without the risk of financial hardship.

10

Appoint nurse leaders to executive positions of all health care organisations and government policy making. Strengthen nursing leadership throughout health systems and create and sustain nursing leadership roles where they are most needed.

Introduction



The International Council of Nurses (ICN) and its 136 member national nursing associations (NNAs), representing the 28 million nurses around the world, call on governments, civil societies, international organisations, health care providers and health professionals to take action and be accountable in creating and sustaining health care systems that are safe, affordable and accessible.

We boldly state this because it is a fundamental requirement for the fulfillment of human rights. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has stated that *“health is a fundamental human right indispensable for the exercise of other human rights. Every human being is entitled to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health conducive to living a life in dignity.”* (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2000)

ICN understands that many countries have made progress in prioritising health. However, in many circumstances, health continues to be viewed as an economic equation isolated from sustainable development. Health cannot be viewed as expenditure on human capital. It must be considered as an investment that is intrinsically linked to a healthy society.

The world cannot afford repeated disasters on the scale of COVID-19, whether or not they are triggered by the next pandemic, global conflict or any other disaster. Going back to ‘normal’ is not good enough.

We have laid out the devastating effects of the pandemic in our recent report, *Recover to Rebuild: Investing in the Nursing Workforce for Health System Effectiveness* (Buchan & Catton, 2023), which should be read alongside this report. It describes the toll COVID-19 has taken on nurses around the globe, including studies that show that anxiety, stress, depression, burnout, psychological distress and post-traumatic stress disorder are severely affecting nurses in some

settings. The report asserts that the world-wide nursing shortage is a global health emergency, and that unless the nursing workforce is given the resources to recover, nations will not be able to rebuild their health services or meet their populations’ growing needs. The remedy for the current situation is for governments to take urgent action, and plan more effectively for the future.

As part of its *Our Nurses. Our Future* campaign and in celebration of International Nurses Day 2023, ICN is turning its sights on the future of nursing and health care and hereby presents this **Charter for Change** as an actionable solution to the global nursing workforce crisis.

Nurses provide care and leadership to address global health challenges everywhere, often at great personal risk. They are the essential life force for health, yet our health care systems worldwide have fallen short and failed to value, protect, respect and invest in this precious resource. The world has taken nurses for granted, treating them as an invisible and inexhaustible resource. It is now painfully apparent that nurses are endangered by the lack of respect and investment needed for a strong, enduring and sustainable workforce.

Nurses are key to healthier communities, responsive societies, thriving economies and powerful nations. Now is the time for policy makers, national and local decision-makers to take decisive steps to build and optimise an enduring, strong and healthy sustainable nursing workforce. ICN’s Charter for Change presents **10 vital policy actions** that governments and employers must take to create and sustain health care systems that are safe, affordable, accessible and responsive, and to shift the paradigm and align nurses to be visible, valued and vital for the health of our countries and to nurse the world and profession back to health.

1

Protect and invest in the nursing profession

Our Nurses.

Protect and invest in the nursing profession to rebuild health systems that can deliver the Sustainable Development Goals and Universal Health Coverage to improve global health. Recognise and value health and health care as an investment not a cost. Secure commitments for investment to maintain equitable and people-centred care.

Our Future.



Building resilient health systems that are capable of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Universal Health Coverage (UHC) requires significant investment in the nursing profession. Nurses are the largest group of health care workers and are often the first point of contact for patients. Better health outcomes, improved access to care, and lower health care costs can result from investing in nursing and respecting their rights (Stewart *et al.*, 2022). However, nurses are frequently underappreciated and their contributions to global health are not sufficiently acknowledged or valued. In many countries, especially those with low and middle incomes, this undervaluation has led to severe workforce shortages of nurses.

Over the past few years, the pressure on health care professionals has been enormous, and the burden has fallen particularly heavily on nurses. As the pandemic challenges ease in some places and persist in others, it is becoming increasingly clear that the world is facing a new and even larger public health emergency – severe nursing workforce shortages. Never has health care been more complex, and never before has demand outstripped capacity to such an extent.

Nurses are the backbone of the health care system, providing essential care, education, leadership, support and advocacy for patients, families and communities. They play a critical role in promoting health, preventing illness, managing chronic conditions and navigating health and social systems. Nurses are on the front line of health care, working tirelessly to ensure that patients receive the care they need, often under difficult and challenging circumstances. They are now working longer hours, with less support, and under more stressful conditions than ever before.

Underinvestment, under-resourcing and failure to meet the obligations outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have placed the nursing

profession in a precarious place (Stewart *et al.*, 2022). Nursing is one of the most critical and challenging professions, yet it is also one of the most underpaid and undervalued. Nurses are often overworked, endure long hours, in environments with limited resources and inadequate staffing levels. This situation is unacceptable and unsustainable.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the nursing crisis into sharp focus. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of the nursing profession and the critical role nurses play in the healthcare system (Buchan & Catton, 2023). However, it has also shown how overstretched and under-resourced nurses are, and how vulnerable they are to the consequences of a global health crisis. In many countries, nurses have been working without adequate resources and personal protective equipment, putting their health and lives at risk (Stewart *et al.*, 2022).

The nursing crisis is a global issue, affecting both developed and developing countries. The World Health Organization

(WHO) has warned that there is a global shortage of nurses, and the situation is set to worsen as the population ages. According to a recent study published in the *Lancet* (Haakenstad, 2022), there is a current shortfall of over 30 million nurses globally, with the greatest shortages expected to be in low- and middle-income countries.

The nursing crisis is a multifaceted issue that requires urgent attention. Governments need to invest in health care and prioritise the recruitment and retention of nurses. The nursing profession must be adequately compensated, and working conditions improved. Nurses need to be provided with the necessary resources and support to carry out their duties effectively. Countries have a reciprocal duty to support and protect nurses to advance health locally and globally.

A nursing workforce that is valued, supported, equipped and healthy is able to provide the highest levels of support and health care for individuals and communities. Investment in nursing must be considered as a priority in the flourishing of a healthy society.

30 million nurses and midwives short globally.

For effective UHC coverage (80 out of 100) to be achieved, there is currently an aggregate workforce shortage of 30.6 million nurses and midwives. (Haakenstad, 2022)

Protect and invest in the nursing profession through the implementation of the Global Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery

The WHO Global Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery (GSDNM) (WHO, 2021) is an essential framework for strengthening the nursing and midwifery workforce worldwide. The framework provides a comprehensive policy roadmap, outlining strategic priorities and actions to address the challenges facing the nursing and midwifery professions and promote their role in achieving UHC and the SDGs. By implementing the strategic priorities and actions, countries can strengthen nursing and midwifery, improve health outcomes, and achieve UHC. The GSDNM outlines four key priorities and actions:

- **Strengthening leadership and governance structures for nursing and midwifery:** This involves advocating for the establishment of strong leadership and governance structures at national and global levels, promoting the inclusion of nursing and midwifery in policy and decision-making processes, and increasing investment in nursing and midwifery.
- **Promoting the role of nursing and midwifery in achieving universal health coverage:** This involves advocating for the inclusion of nursing and midwifery in health system planning and design, promoting the role of nursing and midwifery in the delivery of primary health care services, and improving access to quality nursing and midwifery services.
- **Strengthening nursing and midwifery education:** This involves improving the quality and relevance of nursing and midwifery education programmes, promoting lifelong learning and continuing professional development for nurses and midwives, and ensuring that these programmes are competency based and are aligned with national health priorities.

- **Strengthening the role of nursing and midwifery in health service delivery:** This involves supporting the development of nursing and midwifery-led models of care, promoting the use of evidence-based practice, and strengthening the role of nursing and midwifery in the delivery of essential health services.

On International Nurses Day (IND) 2022 (Stewart, *et al.* 2022), ICN called for investing in and prioritising the safety of health care workers and nurses' health and well-being. Despite the fact that the safety, health and well-being of nurses and midwives are implicit in the GSDNM, which addresses the need to attract, recruit and retain nurses, ICN believes that the issues of safety and well-being have come to the forefront during the pandemic and warrant sufficient attention as separate topics due to the neglect of fundamental rights affecting nurses around the world. ICN calls for investing and securing the physical and psychological safety and protection of nurses.

► Further information:

- [WHO Global Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery \(2021-2025\)](#)
- [ICN Nurses: A Voice to Lead – Invest in nursing and respect rights to secure global health](#)

Recognising health and health care as an investment

In March 2016, the United Nations High-Level Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth (HLC) was established as a response to the growing recognition that health and economic development are inextricably linked. The HLC inspired efforts to promote investments in the health workforce as a means of achieving the SDGs. They found that health and health care investments can yield significant social and economic benefits, such as increased productivity, improved economic growth and reduced health care costs. Investment in the nursing profession can contribute to job creation, particularly for women, who make up the majority of the nursing workforce. Investing in health and health care can lead to a healthier, more productive workforce, which can have a positive impact on the overall economy.

Investing in nursing has been a crucial aspect of global health policy, considering nurses constitute the majority of the global health workforce and the largest health care expenditure. Despite their significant contribution to the health care sector, nurses often face a shortage of resources and inadequate compensation for their knowledge and services. Investing in nurses is seen as a cost burden rather than value for money. However, when appropriate investments are made in nursing, it can lead to various benefits including improved access to health care, improved patient outcomes, and reduced health care costs.

Governments will say that they cannot afford to pay more nurses or pay nurses more. But the reality of the current situation, as revealed in Recover to Rebuild (Buchan & Catton, 2023), is that they are paying excessive amounts to

cover the costs of nurses being off sick, absent from work, or leaving their jobs altogether, rather than investing in the wellbeing of their current staff and the long-term success of their future nursing workforce.

ICN calls on governments and health care systems need to prioritise investments in nursing as a proven strategy to improve the health care sector's overall stability and performance. This is especially true in small states, lower income states and fragile states, which are most vulnerable to nurse outflow, and which were affected more severely by the pandemic (Buchan & Catton, 2023).

► **Further information:**

- [ICN Nurses: A Voice to Lead – Health is a human right: access, investment and economic growth](#)
- [WHO High Level Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth](#)
- [BBC StoryWorks - Caring with Courage: Extraordinary Stories of Nurses](#)

Advance commitments to progress UHC and the SDGs

At the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2019, one of the agenda items was the Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting on UHC. It brought together world leaders, policymakers, civil society, and the private sector to accelerate progress towards achieving UHC by 2030. The meeting adopted a political declaration aimed at strengthening health systems and advancing UHC globally (UN, 2019).

The Political Declaration on UHC recognises that health is a human right and that achieving UHC is essential for sustainable development. It reaffirms the commitment of the United Nations Member States to work towards UHC by strengthening health systems, improving access to quality health services, and addressing the social, economic and environmental determinants of health. The declaration highlights the importance of investing in primary health care (PHC) and ensuring that health services are people-centred, integrated and equitable. It also emphasises the need for increased financing for health, including domestic resource mobilisation, international aid, and innovative financing mechanisms.

The declaration calls for strengthened partnerships and collaboration between governments, civil society, the private sector, and international organisations to accelerate progress towards UHC. It recognises the role of health workers and calls for investments in their education, training and working conditions. The declaration, which has been adopted by UN Member States, has significant implications for global health and provides a roadmap for accelerating progress towards UHC. ICN calls on countries to advance and fulfil commitments outlined in this declaration.

► **Further information:**

- [United Nations General Assembly 74th Session – Political Declaration of the high-level meeting on Universal Health Coverage](#)

Invest in nursing to maintaining equitable and people-centred care

Access to health care is a fundamental human right, as recognised by WHO (WHO, 2022a). Nurses play a critical role in ensuring that everyone has access to quality health care services, regardless of their socio-economic status, race, gender, religion, culture or geographic location. Despite progress made in recent years, access to health care remains a challenge in many parts of the world. Nurses are often the first point of contact for patients seeking health care, and they are well-positioned to promote universal access to health care and address the social determinants of health such as poverty, education and housing. Nurses can play a critical role in maintaining equitable and people-centred care by providing culturally sensitive care, promoting health education, and advocating for policies that support equitable health care delivery. ICN calls for the investment in nursing that is crucial for health systems to advance more equitable and people-centred care.

► **Further information:**

- [ICN Nurses: A Voice to Lead – Health for All: Nursing, Global Health and Universal Health Coverage](#)

Conclusion

The nursing profession is facing a crisis that has only been exposed and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Underinvestment, under-resourcing, and failure to meet the obligations outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have placed the nursing profession in a precarious place. To address this issue, governments, health care organisations, and international agencies must prioritise investment in nursing, implement the GSDNM, recognise health and health care as investments, advance commitments to UHC and SDGs, and progress more equitable and people-centred care. By doing so, we can not only strengthen the nursing profession but also create a more resilient, inclusive and effective global health care system that achieves the vision outlined in the SDGs.

2

Ensure safe and healthy working conditions and respect nurses' rights

Our Nurses.

Our Future.

Urgently address and improve support for nurses' health and well-being by ensuring safe and healthy working conditions and respecting their rights. Put in place systems to ensure safe staffing levels. Ensure protections against violence and hazards in the workplace and implement and enforce international labour standards on the rights of nurses to work in safe and healthy supportive environments ensuring physical as well as mental health protections.



The physical and mental health of nurses is affected by the demands of their workplace, and, in turn, their well-being influences their work and the individuals they care for. ICN's *Recover to Rebuild* report (Buchan & Catton, 2023) provides evidence from more than 100 studies of the toll the pandemic and current working practices are having on the well-being of nurses around the world. It says for the world's health systems to recover there will need a consistent and long-lasting effort, which could risk creating disillusion among nurses if there is no sign of respite and positive change, pushing even more of them to breaking point.

At the core of an effective health system is a healthy, engaged and productive workforce. Therefore, achieving meaningful and sustainable transformation to the health system begins with valuing health professionals and supporting them to find joy and meaning in their work (Sikka, Morath & Leape, 2015). In reality, this means that nurses have a sense of accomplishment, involvement in decision-making and meaning in their contributions. Unfortunately, this is often not recognised or achieved. In part, this is due to threats or experience of psychological or physical harm in the work environment. These issues are further compounded by production pressures, poor design of workflow, the proportion of non-value-added work, the lack of respect and the flatlining remuneration (Sikka, Morath & Leape, 2015; Bodenheimer & Sinsky, 2014).



How can people deliver compassionate care if they are not cared for too?

Mark Britnell (2019)



One clear signal of the current level of impact and concern is that the last 12 months have seen an unprecedented growth in protests and strike action by nurses in many countries. This industrial action is a last resort in reaction to inadequate responses by government and employers to concerns about workplace safety, working conditions and an absence of safe staffing levels (Buchan & Catton, 2023).

Global health challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic and its response have all placed unparalleled demands and heavy workloads on nurses. Over time, this has caused weariness and burnout in many nurses providing direct patient care. Whilst this is a major concern for many nurses considering leaving the profession, many nurses cite other reasons. This includes violence in the health care setting, poor organisational culture, heavy workloads, understaffing, feeling undervalued by managers and the organisation, limited work choices, choosing between career and family, and insufficient pay (Stewart *et al.*, 2022). To restore joy and meaning in work will require a comprehensive and multifaceted approach. If achieved, the rewards of an inspired workplace could be immense with direct benefits to patients and budgetary costs.

organisational culture, heavy workloads, understaffing, feeling undervalued by managers and the organisation, limited work choices, choosing between career and family, and insufficient pay (Stewart *et al.*, 2022). To restore joy and meaning in work will require a comprehensive and multifaceted approach. If achieved, the rewards of an inspired workplace could be immense with direct benefits to patients and budgetary costs.

Improve the health and well-being of nurses by respecting nurses' rights to a safe and healthy work environment

ICN affirms that every nurse has the right to work in a healthy and safe environment without risk of injury or illness resulting from that work. However, the work environment of health care workers, and particularly nurses, is considered to be one of the most hazardous occupational settings. Nurses face a range of challenges that negatively impact their health and wellbeing, including pathogen exposure, long working hours and shift work, psychological distress, fatigue, occupational burnout, stigma, physical and psychological violence.

The health and wellbeing of nurses is vitally important for several reasons including, but not limited to (Affara *et al.*, 2020):

- Improved patient outcomes: Nurses who work in a safe and healthy environment are more likely to provide safer and better patient care, leading to improved patient outcomes and satisfaction.
- Increased staff retention: When nurses feel valued and protected, they are more likely to remain in their jobs, reducing the costs associated with high turnover rates.
- Improved mental health: Addressing workplace stressors can reduce rates of burnout, anxiety and depression among nursing staff.
- Foster a positive work culture: A safe and healthy work environment can help build a positive work culture that encourages teamwork, collaboration and respect among colleagues.

ICN calls for action to be taken to ensure a safe and healthy work environment including adhering to International Labour Organization (ILO) resolutions; ensuring national legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms are robust; implementing minimum standards for sanitation and infection control; collecting and reporting information on health care worker infections; investigating and publicly reporting systematic failures at health facilities; protecting nurses from violence and harassment; providing adequate and available resources and equipment; sufficient and appropriate education and continuing professional development; and promoting a culture of respect and collaboration within health care organisations.

► **Further information:**

- [ICN Position Statement – Occupational Health and Safety for Nurses](#)
- [ILO Resolution on the inclusion of a safe and healthy working environment](#)
- [ICN – Nurses: A Voice to Lead – A vision for future health care](#)

Invest in safe staffing levels across the continuum of care

According to ICN's position statement on 'Evidenced-based safe nurse staffing' (ICN, 2018), safe nurse staffing means that *"an appropriate number of nurses is available at all times across the continuum of care, with a suitable mix of education, skills and experience to ensure that patient care needs are met and that the working environment and conditions support staff to deliver quality care."* Nurse staffing levels have a direct impact on patient outcomes and the quality of care provided. Research has shown that understaffing can lead to increased patient mortality rates, longer hospital stays, and higher readmission rates. Additionally, nurses working in understaffed units are at greater risk of burnout, stress and workplace injuries (Buchan & Catton, 2023). Safe staffing levels are essential to ensuring the health and well-being of nurses and the patients they care for. But pre-existing understaffing and resource limitations were exposed and amplified by the pandemic, and by the rebuild focus. This has added to the stress and workload of the nurses who cannot be expected to continue to bear the personal burden of the demands for health system rebuild. (Buchan & Catton, 2023).

COVID and the response from many countries and health systems has required that nurses jeopardize their own safety, and that of their loved ones in order to provide care.

The *Recover to Rebuild* report (Buchan & Catton, 2023) argues that governments should carry out assessments of the impact of policies on the nursing workforce, and make commitments to invest in safe staffing levels. ICN calls on countries, regulators, policymakers and nursing professionals to collaborate and take immediate, proactive steps to ensure safe staffing levels in health care facilities. Actions include:

- Advocate for evidence-based nurse staffing legislation and policies: Encourage the development and implementation of local, state or national legislation and policies that set evidence-based safe staffing levels, tailored to the specific needs of different specialties and contexts.
- Utilise evidence-based safe staffing policies that take into consideration patient acuity, skill mix and available resources. Staffing levels should be able to be adjusted depending on demand and need.
- Raise awareness and engage in dialogue: Foster open and transparent conversations about the importance of safe staffing levels among health care professionals, patients, families and the general public. Share research findings, and best practices to raise awareness and build support for change.
- Invest in workforce planning and development: Allocate resources for nursing education and professional development to ensure a consistent supply of skilled nurses. Develop and implement strategies to address recruitment and retention challenges, such as offering competitive salaries, flexible work arrangements and opportunities for career growth.
- Foster a culture of collaboration and inclusivity: Encourage active involvement of nursing staff in decision-making processes related to staffing levels, policies and practices. Create a supportive work environment that values the contributions of all team members and encourages open communication and feedback.
- Monitor and evaluate staffing policies regularly: Implement systems to regularly assess and adjust staffing policies based on patient outcomes, staff well-being, and resource availability. Use data-driven approaches to refine and optimise safe staffing, ensuring that they remain effective and responsive to changing needs.

► **Further information**

- [ICN Position Statement – Safe staffing](#)

Protect nurses from all forms of violence

Attacks, assaults and aggressive behaviour against nurses pose a serious threat to health systems' resilience as well as the growth and sustainability of UHC. To create a safe and courteous workplace, safeguards must be put in place. Governments and society frequently fail to recognise workplace violence against health professionals as a social issue. The world community needs to put this at the top

1,595
deaths would have
been avoided.

Research into 87 acute care facilities in Illinois found that “if hospitals staffed at a 4:1 ratio during the 1-year study period, more than 1,595 deaths would have been avoided and hospitals would have collectively saved over \$117 million.” (Lasater, *et al.*, 2021).

of its agenda and take action through efforts from governments, policymakers, educators, researchers, health managers, and most importantly, communities. The forefront in preserving and sustaining good health and welfare is held by nurses, who deserve respect and appreciation.

Violence against nurses is a growing concern within health care settings worldwide. Nurses often face physical, verbal and emotional abuse from patients, family members and even coworkers. These incidents can lead to physical and psychological harm, job dissatisfaction, and increased turnover rates. In an ICN study, 1 in 4 nurses reported experiencing physical violence at work in the previous year, and 40% reported experiencing verbal abuse. Therefore, providing adequate protection against violence is critical to ensuring the health and well-being of nurses.

ICN calls on health care organisations, administrators, nursing professionals and the community at large to collaborate to address the growing issue of violence against nurses. It is essential to prioritise the safety and well-being of nurses through:

- encouraging health care organisations to adopt comprehensive policies and procedures addressing workplace violence, and promote a culture of zero-tolerance towards any form of aggression against nursing staff;
- advocating for increased funding and resources dedicated to enhancing security measures in health care settings, including security personnel, surveillance systems, and personal safety devices;
- supporting the development and implementation of evidence-based training programmes focused on violence prevention, de-escalation techniques, and self-defense for nurses;
- raising awareness among the public about the importance of treating nursing professionals with respect and dignity, and the consequences of violent behavior towards health care workers;

- encouraging health care organisations to create a supportive work environment by promoting open communication, providing access to counseling and support services, and recognising the efforts of nursing staff in maintaining a safe workplace (Stewart *et al.*, 2019).

► **Further information:**

- [ICN Position Statement - Prevention and management of workplace violence](#)
- [Violence Against Health Care: Current practices to prevent, reduce or mitigate violence against health care](#)

Conclusion

The health and well-being of nurses are paramount to the success and sustainability of our health care systems. Nurses play a critical role in patient care, and their well-being directly impacts patient outcomes, staff retention and overall work culture. As such, urgent action is required to address the challenges they face, including unsafe working conditions, violence and understaffing. By improving the health and well-being of nurses through the implementation of safe staffing levels, promoting a safe and healthy work environment, and protecting nurses from violence, we can create a positive and productive health care system that benefits not only the nurses themselves but also the patients and communities they serve. Moreover, a comprehensive, multifaceted approach must be employed to restore joy and meaning in the nursing profession, ultimately leading to improved patient care and more efficient use of resources. By investing in our nurses, we invest in a healthier, happier future for all.

3

Recruit and retain nurses by ensuring fair and decent pay and positive practice environments

Our Nurses.

Our Future.

Advance strategies to recruit and retain nurses to address workforce shortages. Improve compensation for nurses to ensure fair and decent pay and benefits, and uphold positive practice environments that listen to nurses and provide them with the resources they need to do their job safely, effectively and efficiently.

Fund professional governance, recognition and development activities across career trajectories.



The shortage of nurses is a significant concern in most countries around the world. The problem is compounded by an ageing workforce, higher demand for health care services, a limited supply of qualified nurses and an increasing desire of nurses to leave the profession due to high levels of stress and burnout, and insufficient nursing education capacity. Survey results from nurses in Australia, Brazil, France, Japan, Singapore, United Kingdom and the United States indicate that, despite nurses' commitment

Nursing turnover is costly
Nursing turnover rates vary considerably between countries with 15.1% in Australia; 27.65% in USA; South Korea 42.7%; 44.3% in New Zealand. The costs per nurse turnover also varies with studies estimating between \$21k - \$88k (USD) (Bae, 2022; Duffield et al., 2014).

to their profession, COVID-19 has cast a long shadow and between 20% and 38% of respondents stated that they intended to leave their current role in direct patient care within the next 12 months (Berlin *et al.*, 2022). The reasons for this vary, but they include the historic underfunding of nurses' pay, which has fallen behind other workers' pay in real terms in recent years, lack of workplace support and increased workloads (Buchan & Catton, 2023, p. 20).

Provide competitive salaries and benefits / Remunerate nurses at a fair and adequate level that attracts, retains and motivates them to meet the health needs of the community

Despite the highlighting of nurses' lifesaving work during the pandemic, there has been little to no action or planning on the long called-for pay increase for nurses. In many countries (e.g. France, Finland, India, Latvia, Lithuania, Nigeria, Philippines, South Africa and Switzerland), nurses earned less than the average wage of all workers. In many countries, nurses wages have either stagnated or declined over the last decade (OECD, 2021a; Catton, 2018). Salary is a critical factor in attracting and retaining nurses (OECD, 2022a). Studies cited in our *Recover to Rebuild* report (Buchan & Catton, 2023) show that pay is a very strong driver of people's intention to leave the profession, and it is also a major factor in the increase in industrial strife that has been evident in the past year.

Pay is also linked to career development opportunities and promotion: unless there are clear career pathways, and nurses can see that they are accessible to them as individuals, discontent about poor pay and lack of hope for future pay rises will continue to be a disincentive for nurses to stay in their jobs.

Offering competitive salaries and benefits, such as health insurance, retirement plans, and flexible working hours, can help organisations attract and retain qualified nurses.

Nurses are health professionals with a special set of abilities that allow them to deliver high-quality care and influence positive patient outcomes. ICN calls on countries and health systems to demonstrate that they value their knowledge, expertise and dedication by providing competitive com-

penetration and benefits. This would include fair pay and conditions of employment, structured career opportunities, and access to continuing education, and support for well-being, to ensure that the damaging effects of nurse burnout are combatted, that nurse unemployment is addressed, and that the drivers of nurse strikes are tackled. (Buchan & Catton, 2023). This investment not only raises the standard of health care, but it also shows how much we value the important part nurses play in our communities.

► Further information:

- [ICN Workforce Forums](#)
- [OECD Remuneration of Nurses](#)
- [Recover to Rebuild: Investing in the Nursing Workforce for Health System Effectiveness](#)

Implement positive work environment strategies that are externally verified or accredited

Nurses seek employment in settings that respect, uphold and value them. Positive practice settings can be established using well-defined procedures. The ability to assess and adopt nursing practice excellence methods with external independent verification is at the heart of this. The key components are transformational leadership, an inclusive management style that involves nurses in decision-making, improved information flow between management and front-line nurses, nurse participation on committees, autonomy for nurses, positive nurse-physician relationships, adequate resources, high career development opportunities with access to continuing professional development, and favourable promotion prospects. Health systems that exhibit these traits both draw in highly trained nursing staff, boost employee satisfaction, and offer high-quality patient care (Tucci, McClain & Peyton, 2022; Kol, Ilaslan & Turkay, 2017; Saunders & Vehviläinen-Julkunen, 2016; Petit dit Dariel & Regnaud, 2015).

ICN calls on countries and health systems to:

- recognise the importance of positive work environments in health care; by emphasising the importance of a positive work environment, health care organisations can create a culture that values and supports employees, ensuring they can provide the highest level of care to patients;
- review and invest in evidence-based actions that have proven to improve positive work environments;
- commit to external verification and accreditation; pursuing external verification or accreditation for positive work environment strategies demonstrates a health systems' commitment to maintaining industry level standards; this process involves an objective assessment of health care providers policies, practices and culture by a recognised independent accrediting body; external verification helps organisations identify areas for improvement and measure progress over time (Petit dit Dariel & Regnaud, 2015);
- engage with nurses and NNAs to support the development or sustaining of positive practice environments: health care organisations, employees, and communities all play a role in fostering positive work environments; to ensure the success of this initiative, it is essential to involve all relevant parties.

► **Further information:**

- [International Centre for Human Resources – Fact Sheet – Positive Practice Environments](#)
- [ICN – Nurses: A Voice to Lead - Nursing the World to Health](#)
- [Positive practice environments: Quality workplaces = Quality patient care](#)
- [WHPA – Stand Up for Positive Practice Environments](#)

Provide professional growth and career development opportunities

Nurses play a crucial part in the health care system since they are accountable for providing patients with high quality care. As health care continually evolves, nurses must develop and acquire new competencies in order to deliver optimal care. To retain and recruit competent nurses, health care organisations must prioritise career development and professional advancement for nurses.

ICN calls for investment in professional growth and career development opportunities that are essential for fostering a skilled, motivated, and resilient workforce. By providing employees with the resources and support they need to advance in their careers, health systems can improve job satisfaction, reduce turnover and optimise patient care (Bae, 2022; Rajamohan, Porock, & Chang, 2019; Waltz *et al.*, 2020; Shaffer & Curtin, 2020). Key actions include:

- creating a culture that values Continuing Professional Development, innovation and collaboration; professional development is vital for nursing satisfaction and improved performance;
- investing in professional development for nurses; this includes offering financial support for employees to attend conferences, workshops, and education programmes;

- encouraging nurses to pursue post graduate qualification, certifications, or other credentials relevant to their field; encouraging nurses to pursue furthering education and professional development is essential for improving patient care, fostering innovation, and addressing workforce shortages in specialist areas;
- establishing career paths for nurses, including opportunities for advancement and leadership roles.

► **Further information:**

- [Invest in nursing and respect rights to secure global health](#)
- [World Health Organization - The WHO Global Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery \(2021–2025\)](#)

Offer work-life balance including improving rostering practices for nurses

Some of the most difficult jobs in the world are found in the health care system. Nurses, in particular, work in a high-stress environment that frequently necessitates long hours, a high level of responsibility and constant critical decision-making. To provide the best possible patient care, it is essential to provide nurses with a work-life balance that allows them to maintain their health and well-being.

A lack of work-life balance can lead to nurse burnout, decreased job satisfaction and an increased risk of mental health issues. Overworked and fatigued nurses are more likely to make mistakes, jeopardising patient safety. Furthermore, a lack of work-life balance can lead to increased absenteeism and staff turnover, both of which can have a negative impact on patient care (Saunders & Vehviläinen-Julkunen, 2016; Sovold *et al.*, 2021).

Better rostering practices are one way for nurses to improve their work-life balance. Examples include offering flexible working hours, allowing nurses to choose their shifts, and reducing the number of consecutive shifts they are required to work. Nurses can better manage their personal lives by providing more flexible and predictable schedules, reducing the stress and fatigue that comes with long hours and unpredictable shifts (Butler *et al.*, 2019).

Improving rostering practices can also contribute to better patient care. Nurses can avoid fatigue, which can lead to errors and poor patient care, by reducing the number of consecutive shifts they are required to work. Furthermore, providing more flexible working hours can ensure that nurses are rested and alert when on duty, which can improve patient outcomes (Butler *et al.*, 2019).

► **Further information:**

- [International Labour Organization - Decent Working Time for Nursing Personnel](#)
- [ICN Evidence-based safe nurse staffing](#)

Strengthen and resource professional governance for nurses so that they have a clear voice regarding the issues that affect the nursing profession and nursing practice

Professional governance is related to the development, implementation and evaluation of the legislation, regulations, standards and policies that govern the nursing profession. It ensures that nurses are appropriately educated and prepared for practice; that they continue to uphold the highest standards of professionalism; and improves nurses' collaborative work and decision-making that affect nursing practice (NMBA, 2023). Professional governance is important because (ANA, 2015; IOM, 2011):

- It improves the quality of care: Professional governance ensures that nurses have the knowledge, skills and attributes required for quality nursing care. It also ensures that nurses adhere to professional standards and codes of ethics, which are designed to protect patients from harm.
- It promotes accountability: Professional governance promotes accountability among nurses by establishing clear standards for their conduct and performance. It also provides a framework for addressing concerns or complaints about a nurse's behaviour or performance.
- It supports professional development: Professional governance provides opportunities for nurses to continue their education and professional development, ensuring that they remain up to date with the latest research, evidence, and practice.
- It enhances professional image: Professional governance contributes to the enhancement of the nursing profession's image by enforcing high standards of conduct and performance among nurses. This can aid in enhancing the public's impression of nursing and fostering greater confidence in the profession.

It is essential that nurses have leading roles on issues affecting the profession and their practice. Key strategies to enable this include:

- recognising the importance of professional governance for nurses — nurses must be the leaders in the field guiding the professional practice of nursing;
- committing to strengthening and resourcing professional governance for nursing;
- ensuring that there are Chief Nursing Officers in Ministries of Health and Executive Directors of Nursing in health care provider organisations; invest in these positions so that they have the necessary resources to fulfil their duties.

► Further information:

- [Institute of Medicine - The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health](#)
- [WHO State of the world's nursing 2020: investing in education, jobs and leadership](#)

Conclusion

Addressing the shortage of nurses requires implementing a combination of strategies to recruit and retain nurses. This includes improving compensation for nurses to ensure fair and decent pay and benefits; upholding positive practice environments that value the voice of nurses and providing them with the resources they need to do their job safely, effectively and efficiently; investing in professional governance, recognition and development activities across the career lifespan; offering work-life balance and providing career growth opportunities. Investing in the nursing profession not only raises the standard of health care, but it also shows how much we value the vital role nurses play in our communities. By prioritising these strategies, we can ensure that the nursing profession remains a fulfilling and rewarding career and that patients have access to high quality nursing care.

4

Develop, implement and finance national nursing workforce plans

Our Nurses.

Develop, implement and finance national nursing workforce plans with the objective of self-sufficiency in the supply of future nurses. Align resources to support a robust nursing workforce to deliver essential health services, reverse unemployment and retain talent. When international migration takes place, ensure it is ethical, transparent, monitored and delivers equal mutual benefits for sending and receiving countries as well as respecting the rights of individual nurses. Undertake system workforce planning and monitoring across the care continuum.

Our Future.



The biggest challenge facing health care systems across the world in delivering safe, affordable and accessible care is workforce shortages, maldistribution and misuse of nurses. Nurses across the world provide up to 80% of hands-on health care (Stewart *et al.*, 2019). Nurses are often the only health professionals with whom patients interact. They provide care, support, treatment, education and many other services to improve the health and well-being of individuals and communities across the world. Nurses are at the forefront of addressing global health priorities such as non-communicable diseases, ageing, infectious diseases and outbreaks, anti-microbial resistance, and other health emergencies. Therefore, nurses are intrinsically linked to a country's ability to address health priorities.

**Nurses across
the world
provide up to
80% of hands-on
health care.**

Building high-performing resilient health systems starts with human resources for health. In addition to enough health professionals, they need to be equitably distributed and accessible to populations; have the right knowledge, skills and attributes; and be empowered and motivated to deliver health care that is appropriate to individuals and communities.

The nursing workforce is a critical component of the health care system, and shortages of nurses pose a threat to health globally. Many countries rely on international recruitment to meet their nursing needs, but this strategy is not sustainable in the long term. Immediate action is required to address workforce shortages across the world.

Develop nursing workforce plans that take into consideration community health needs, the complexity of health systems and emerging models of care across the continuum of care

The process of calculating the necessary nursing workforce to fulfil future demands for health services and developing plans to meet those demands is known as workforce planning. Planning for the nursing workforce essentially tries to strike a balance between demand and supply for nurses. It can be stated simply as ensuring that the appropriate nurses possess the appropriate abilities and are present at the appropriate time and location. It should incorporate knowledge of the problems and policy controls that affect the nursing workforce.

The development of nursing workforce plans is complex and challenging due to the many variables including, but not limited to, community health needs, patient acuity and complexity, diversity of nursing activities across the continuum of care, staff turnover and changing demographics of the profession.

Countries need to consider these elements, review and expand domestic nursing education systems, and monitor and track their ability to be self-sufficient – that is, create enough nurses to meet their populations' needs. They should also establish plans to address nursing shortages with the ultimate aim of achieving self-sufficiency in the supply of nurses whilst also considering that they are part of the global market (Buchan & Catton, 2023). Other key considerations include (AHWAC, 2004):

- the distribution of the nursing workforce based on optimal and equitable access to health care that recognises the specific health needs of communities;

- cohesive action between health, education and regulatory sectors to ensure an adequately prepared and ongoing supported workforce;
- the ability to adapt and optimise models of care to consider advances and evolution in nursing;
- linking with the broader health and workforce plans that are consumer focused; and
- the ability to implement, resource, monitor and evaluate workforce plans.

► Further information:

- [ICN Sustain and Retain in 2022 and Beyond](#)
- [Recover to Rebuild: Investing in the Nursing Workforce for Health System Effectiveness](#)

Establish a comprehensive national nursing workforce dataset that aligns with global standards and definitions. Data should be routinely collected and used to inform national and international workforce planning

The ability to obtain timely, and trustworthy data is essential for workforce planning. The type of information or data that is accessible, as well as the time and resources available for gathering and analysing the data, are all factors that affect each step of the workforce planning process.

The WHO *State of the World's Nursing* report (WHO, 2020a) demonstrated the challenges of collecting and reporting on data and information from countries across the world. The value of workforce datasets for nursing services are undervalued across the world. This is evidenced by the lack of standardised definitions and the availability of timely and accurate minimum datasets.

There are few nursing workforce datasets that enable both high- and low-level applications, even if a comprehensive dataset was found to have substantial use at several levels. When creating and maintaining thorough nursing datasets, the effects of this sparsity and the absence of standardisation can be profound. For instance, erroneous data could make it difficult to calculate the nursing workload, and a lack of knowledge about the skill mix of nurses makes it difficult to maintain safe staffing. Without the support of a strong and reliable dataset, the ability to comprehend nursing turnover rates and costs is severely limited (Buchan *et al.*, 2015; Aiken *et al.*, 2017).

Timely access to nursing workforce data and information is fundamental to address key issues, facilitate sound planning and decision-making, maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of the nursing workforce across all levels, support evidence-based decision-making, monitor workforce trends and support nursing research. As nurse staffing is linked to patient outcomes and the health of communities, it is also crucial that accurate and consistent data are readily available (ACN, 2020).

Key considerations for a minimum dataset include (ACN, 2020):

- standardisation of definitions and terminology for the nursing workforce;
- expansion of current minimum datasets that take into consideration registration, education, skill mix, turnover, job satisfaction, specialisation, area of work, workforce demographics, employment status and other health system performance related data;
- process for routine collection and reporting.

► **Further information:**

- [WHO - Global Health Observatory](#)

Implement and resource nursing workforce plans

National nursing workforce plans face several challenges, such as limited funding, the lack of political will, and the lack of buy-in from the nursing profession. These challenges can hinder the successful implementation of these plans and pose a threat to the sustainability of the nursing workforce.

- **Limited funding:** One of the primary challenges faced by the development and implementation of national nursing workforce plans is limited funding. The cost of nursing education, recruitment and retention programmes can be expensive, and many countries struggle to allocate sufficient funding to support these initiatives.
- **Lack of political will:** Another challenge faced in the development and implementation of national nursing workforce plans is the lack of political will. Some governments may not prioritise health care and nursing workforce development. Political instability or changes in government can also result in the interruption or cancellation of nursing workforce plans.

- **Lack of buy-in from the nursing profession:** The lack of buy-in from the nursing profession can also pose challenges to successful development and implementation of national nursing workforce plans. Nurses and nursing organisations are often not actively involved in the development of these plans, leading to a lack of alignment with the needs and priorities of the nursing profession.

Addressing these challenges will require a collaborative effort from governments, health systems, nursing organisations, and nurses themselves to ensure that nursing workforce plans are adequately funded, supported and valued.

► **Further information:**

- [WHO Working for health and growth: investing in the health workforce - High-Level Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth](#)

Support the ethical recruitment of nurses and adhere to the WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel

Nurse migration is a critical health issue with challenges that have been recognised by global communities for decades. There are numerous benefits to nurse migration, but there are also potential adverse consequences to health systems and the people they serve as well as relevant human rights concerns of the nurses themselves.

While considering patient health outcomes in source countries is important, it must be balanced against nurses' rights and freedoms. Foreign-educated nurses help to fill health care shortages while also increasing cultural diversity and contributing to economic growth and development. Unjust distribution of health care services in source countries, on the other hand, must be carefully balanced against individual

**60%
increase
in migrant nurses and
physicians working in
higher income countries
in the last decade
(WHO 2020b).**

rights to autonomy, freedom and migration. To support solidarity and social responsibility, as well as to improve the well-being of nurses and patient populations, increased awareness of coercion and protection from discrimination must be addressed on a global scale (Socha-Dietrich & Dumont, 2021; Stikes & Iskander, 2021; Shaffer, Bakhshi & Jacobs, 2018; Rosenkoetter, Nardi & Bowcutt, 2017; Stievano *et al.*, 2017).

ICN (ICN, 2019) respects and supports nurses' rights to pursue professional advancement through career mobility and to improve their living and working conditions. Nurse migration has the potential for positive outcomes such as multicultural practice and expanded learning opportunities. To ensure that there are benefits that meet the needs of individuals, communities and health systems, it is important that countries adhere to ethical recruitment processes and that best practice retention strategies are employed. Commitments must also be made to implement and evaluate effective and ethical approaches to the managed international supply of nurses, and there should be regular and systematic nurse workforce impact assessments, particularly in resource-constrained countries (Buchan & Catton, 2023).

► **Further information:**

- [ICN Position Statement: International career mobility and ethical nurse recruitment](#)
- [WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel](#)
- [WHO Global Code of Practice: National Reporting Instrument 2021](#)
- [ILO, OECD & WHO - The International Platform on Health Worker Mobility: Elevating dialogue, knowledge and international cooperation](#)
- [Recover to Rebuild: Investing in the Nursing Workforce for Health System Effectiveness](#)

Conclusion

Addressing the global nursing workforce shortage and ensuring self-sufficiency in the supply of future nurses is a multifaceted challenge that requires comprehensive, collaborative, and well-structured policies.

ICN is calling for an immediate update of the *State of the World's Nursing (SOWN)* analysis to provide current data on the global nursing workforce post-pandemic (Buchan & Catton, 2023). Developing and implementing national nursing workforce plans must consider the complexity of health care systems, emerging models of care, and community needs are essential to overcoming this challenge. Moreover, establishing standardised, comprehensive nursing workforce datasets is vital for informed decision-making and evidence-based planning. Successful implementation of these workforce plans requires adequate funding, political support, and buy-in from the nursing profession. Furthermore, adherence to the WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel ensures that nurse migration is ethical, transparent, and mutually beneficial for all stakeholders involved.

Ultimately, building high-performing, resilient, health systems starts with an adequate number of appropriately distributed and skilled nurses. By prioritising nursing workforce development, countries can improve the health and well-being of their populations, address global health priorities, and ensure the sustainability of their health care systems.

5

Invest in high-quality, accredited nursing education programmes

Our Nurses.

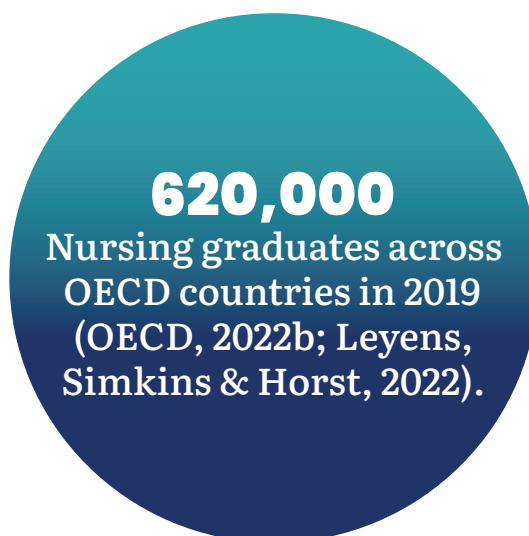
Our Future.

Invest in high-quality, accredited nursing education programmes to prepare more new nurses and advance career development for existing nurses. Design curricula so that nurses graduate with the right skills, competencies and confidence to respond to the changing and evolving health needs of communities and support career progression from generalist to specialist and advanced practice.



The demand for highly skilled nurses has expanded considerably, and this trend is anticipated to escalate as countries seek to rebuild and strengthen their health systems. To fulfil this need and become more self-sustainable, countries must invest in accredited, high-quality nursing education programmes that can prepare more nurses and advance the careers of existing nurses.

The public places high demands on the health professionals that care for them. This is for good reason, as health is one of the highest priorities in life. As a result, there are growing expectations that nursing will deliver personalised care grounded in rights-based service; they will be caring and compassionate with self will take into consideration people's immediate perceived problems in addition to their wider physical, psychosocial and other social determinants; be prepared for rapid technological and scientific advancement, emerging treatments and models of care whilst equipped with the technical and communication skills to work in multidisciplinary teams; and enhance patient health literacy enabling self-management. At the core of developing and building the nursing workforce is high-quality theoretical and practical education. The education of nurses in both the arts and sciences



is crucial in developing a workforce that meets the health needs and expectations of the communities in which they work (Baker, Cary & da Conceicao Bento, 2021).

Research demonstrates that there is a strong correlation between baccalaureate-prepared nurses and improved health outcomes. Worldwide, 91% of nations state that they have criteria for the duration and

content of nursing education, and 89% of countries claim that their educational institutions are accredited (WHO, 2020a). However, the level and quality of education for registered nurses continue to vary considerably between and within countries. The contemporary complexity of health care necessitates a transition in nursing education towards higher degrees of decision-making, clinical judgement, team leadership, and political savvy, enabling nurses to manage care in complicated environments and across the health and

social sectors. In addition, one in eight nurses no longer practices in the nation in where they were born or educated. Therefore, there is an urgent international demand for high-quality recommendations to lead nursing education and for increased global harmonisation of nursing education at the entry level (Baker, Cary & da Conceicao Bento, 2021).

Invest in the planning and development of the education sector to meet the health needs of the community

The scaling up and transformation of education is a complex multidimensional process. It requires increasing the number of nursing graduates whilst ensuring that they have the competencies necessary to meet the health needs of the populations they serve. Capacity considerations include the development of skilled and competent educators, the utilisation of effective and innovative education techniques (e.g. simulation), access to adequate infrastructure and clinical placements, equipment and learning tools (WHO, 2013).

Increasing the number of nursing students graduating each year requires planning, coordination and collaboration among various stakeholders, including health care organisations, educational institutions and regulatory bodies.

Educational institutions must collaborate closely with health care organisations to identify the industry's specific needs and design nursing programmes accordingly. In addition, health care organisations are responsible for providing quality, safe and easily accessible clinical placements, which is frequently a rate-limiting factor in increasing the number of nursing students. Additionally, regulatory bodies should collaborate with educational institutions to establish standards and guidelines for nursing programmes, thereby ensuring that nursing graduates meet the necessary competency requirements. The standards should be reviewed periodically to ensure that they are current and relevant to the evolving needs of the health care industry.

Planning should also consider options to increase admissions from diverse socio-economic, ethnic and geographical populations. Nursing education should be available to all students who have graduated from high school and attained a minimum standard of achievement, regardless of socio-economic, ethnic or geographical background. To ensure that the nursing workforce is representative of the community it serves, it is essential to develop policy options to increase admissions from diverse populations. Offering scholarships and grants to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, expanding the availability of nursing education programmes in rural and remote areas, and collaborating with community-based organisations can help to diversify the nursing workforce.

► **Further information:**

- [ICN – Nurses: A Voice to Lead - Invest in nursing and respect rights to secure global health](#)

Optimise the regulation and accreditation of academic institutions to protect the public and the profession

To protect the public and the nursing profession, it is essential that nursing academic institutions be regulated and accredited. Proper regulation and accreditation can ensure that nursing academic institutions meet the necessary standards and provide nurses with a quality education. This reduces the risk of patient harm by ensuring that nursing students are adequately prepared and graduate with the necessary competencies. In addition, it can protect the reputation and integrity of the nursing profession by ensuring that only qualified and competent nurses enter the field.

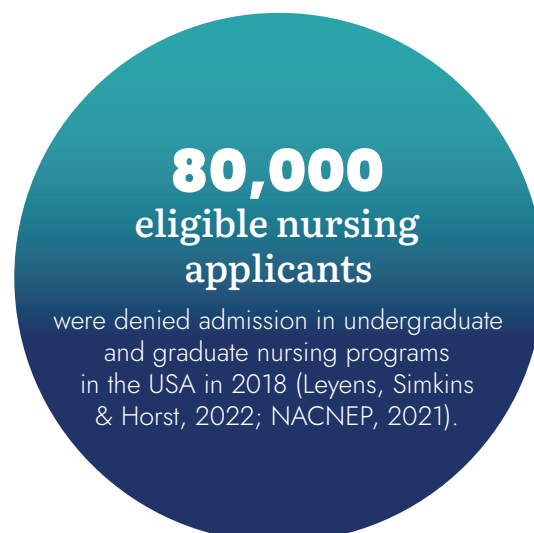
The following aspects of nursing education should be regulated: (i) access and entry to education institutions; (ii) nursing education curricula; (iii) the scope of practice of student learning; (iv) the quality of professional education and respect of nursing code of ethics; (v) the continuing maintenance of competencies for academic staff (WHO, 2013).

► **Further information:**

- [WHO - Transforming and scaling up health professionals' education and training](#)

Strengthen the academic quality of academic learning and practical experience through the implementation of competency-based curricula

Nursing education plays a critical role in producing competent and safe nurses who can provide quality care to patients. The rapid advances in health care technology, changes in health care systems, and the increasing complexity of patient needs necessitate the need for nursing curricula that emphasises competency-based education. Nursing is a challenging profession and requires a high



level of knowledge and skills, with the ability for autonomous decision-making in high-pressure environments. ICN recommends that competency-based education is the accepted standard for nursing education to optimise learning and get the best possible results. Competency-based education is “an outcomes-based approach to curricula design, development and implementation that emphasises the mastery of learning, and application of knowledge, skills and attitudes in the context of performance, rather than the process of learning and the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes” (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2013). It is important to the education of nurses as it can improve the standardisation of education, flexibility in learning and the efficiency and effectiveness of learning.

To get the best out of competency-based education for nurses, it is important that curriculum is regularly updated. The health priorities of communities are continually evolving, and there is a need to regularly update and improve the nursing curriculum to meet these changing needs. Furthermore, the curriculum should be updated to reflect the latest research findings, evidence-based practice guidelines and best practices in nursing (WHO, 2022b).

It must also be recognised that traditional learning techniques are no longer sufficient. There is a need to rapidly upscale the capacity and capability of education providers. However, there are often barriers such as the lack of necessary infrastructure and resources, and access to quality clinical placements. Part of the solution must be to shift towards innovative approaches that incorporate technology and informatics. An example of this is through the use of simulation technology, which can aid students to hone their abilities and knowledge in a secure setting. This technology may replicate a range of patient care circumstances, including emergencies, which can assist students in gaining the confidence and expertise they need to deal with difficult situations in the real world. The use of simulation technology can also give students rapid feedback on how they performed, allowing them to spot areas requiring more

7% decrease in mortality rates.

A 10% increase in the proportion of nurses with a bachelor's degree is associated with a 7% decrease in mortality rates (Aiken *et al.*, 2014; Wieczorek-Wójcik *et al.*, 2022).

work. Additionally, these solutions encourage critical thinking, problem-solving and teamwork—all crucial skills for nursing practice (Herodotou *et al.*, 2019; Rezayi *et al.*, 2022; Jobst *et al.*, 2022).

Technology and informatics are having a major impact on health care systems and will ultimately transform the nursing profession worldwide (Jobst *et al.*, 2022). It is important then that nursing is at the forefront of this aligning and optimising it to improve the education of nurses and nursing students.

➔ Further information:

- [World Health Organization - Global Competency and Outcomes Framework for Universal Health Coverage](#)
- [ICN Core Competencies in Disaster Nursing](#)

Invest in the nursing faculty staff to expand quality education programmes

Whilst the world is in the midst of a long-standing crisis in the shortage of nurses, there is also another crisis affecting the supply and education of nurses—there are severe shortages of nurse faculty (WHO, 2020a; Nardi & Gyurko, 2013). The quality of nursing education programmes depends largely on the competence, expertise and experience of nursing faculty staff. Any effort in increasing the capacity of quality nursing education programmes requires the investment of nursing faculty staff.

There are a number of causes for the shortages of faculty staff around the world. This includes factors such as the migration of nurses, aging faculty, a reduced younger faculty hiring pool, decreased satisfaction with the role, lack of funding and poor salaries, a potential devaluation of faculty staff by academic institutions, and a reduction of full-time staff, and insufficient level of academic attainment of nurses (Nardi & Gyurko, 2013).

Potential solutions to this crisis require a combination of strategies that consider recruitment, preparation, development and retention. These will vary according to country context but should at least consider (i) incorporating academic coursework in nursing education theory and pedagogy within graduate nursing curricula to prepare nurses to assume teaching positions as either faculty or preceptors upon completion; (ii) investing in the academic preparation and continuing education needs of nurses; (iii) increasing the amount of data and information collected on nurse faculty employment, distribution and retention; (iv) improving the image of nurses working in the education sector and highlighting the role as a rewarding career choice; (v) advancing global collaboration and coordination to develop solutions; (vi) investing in competitive nursing faculty salaries and rewards (NACNEP, 2021; Nardi & Gyurko, 2013).

➔ Further information:

- [ICN Policy Brief - Nursing education and the emerging nursing workforce in COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- [WHO - Nurse educator core competencies](#)

Conclusion

The rapidly evolving health care landscape, including advancement in treatments, critical workforce shortages and increasing demand for health care, necessitates significant investment in high-quality, accredited nursing education programmes. Countries must prioritise the planning and development of the education sector to meet the health care needs of their communities, optimise the regulation and accreditation of academic institutions, strengthen the academic quality of nursing programmes through competency-based curricula, and invest in nursing academic staff to expand capacity of quality nursing education programmes.

By doing so, we can ensure that future generations of nurses have the necessary competencies, values and confidence to respond to the dynamic and evolving health needs of communities worldwide.

This will ultimately contribute to improved health outcomes, increased access to quality health care, and the development of a more resilient and sustainable health care systems. It is crucial that stakeholders collaborate and coordinate their efforts to create a nursing workforce that is well-prepared, diverse and responsive to the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

6

Enable nurses to work to their full scope of nursing practice

Enable nurses to work to their full scope of nursing practice by strengthening and modernising regulation and investing in advanced nursing practice and nurse-led models of care. Reorientate and integrate health systems to public health, primary care health promotion and prevention, community, home-based and person-centred care.



Nurses make up over half of the world's health professional workforce and deliver the vast proportion of hands-on patient care. Optimising the use of this workforce can transform the way health care is delivered so that patients can receive better care at an affordable price. Throughout the world, nurses are leading and contributing to innovations to improve health outcomes. However, there is often a variety of redundant and inefficient barriers that limit nursing's ability to maximise its contribution to enable high performing health systems. For too long, nurses have been constrained by environments that unnecessarily restrict both innovation and practice. An optimised and empowered nursing workforce can facilitate a more accessible, affordable, safer and sustainable health care system (Stewart *et al.*, 2022).

Full scope of practice refers to the full spectrum of roles, functions, responsibilities, activities and decision-making

capacity that individuals within the health profession are educated, competent and authorised to perform (Queensland Health, 2017). Full scope of practice is set by numerous factors. However, artificial barriers are often established that stop the realisation of nurses working to their potential. This includes restrictive funding models, cultural barriers between and within disciplines, and regulations and policies that have not kept to date with the evolution of health care. The most important resource health systems have is their health professionals. Too often health professionals are not using their knowledge, skills and attributes to the full extent of

their education. Instead, millions of dollars are wasted paying with underutilisation of human resources. Better use of human resources will improve access to safer care, save money and improve health professional satisfaction.

During the pandemic, long-standing barriers were removed, regulations were modified, and novel strategies were implemented in days and weeks, as opposed to years. COVID-19 has prompted health systems to approach care delivery with a greater degree of inventiveness and flexibility. Throughout this pandemic, nurses were the leaders in driving health system transformation and innovation (Jingxia *et al.*, 2021; Chan *et al.*, 2021).

Review funding models, regulatory and policy frameworks and remove unnecessary restrictions on nursing practice

Tradition, funding models, culture and out-of-date regulations often dictate how highly skilled and educated health professionals spend their time doing straight forward work. This wastes time and money and leads to dissatisfaction amongst health professionals whilst doing nothing to improve the quality of care. Addressing the barriers is important because there is a need for people to work to their full potential. This means more and better care, more rewarding jobs, and a more sustainable health system (Duckett, Breadon & Farmer 2014).

- Modernise regulatory environments: Countries must update and modernise their laws and regulations to make it possible for nurses to practice according to their optimal scope of practice. This includes removing unneeded limitations on nurses' capacity to deliver certain services and giving Advanced Practice Nurses full practice authority¹ (ANA, 2020; AANP, 2022).

- Invest in nurse-led models of care: Nurse-led models of care are well established in health systems across the world and have been shown to be an effective method of addressing gaps in health systems. However, the models are often designed and developed in a haphazard way with little consistency within and between countries. With sufficient planning and investment, nurse-led models of care will improve access to care, particularly for vulnerable communities; improve staff satisfaction as a result of greater use of clinical skills and decision-making; and can provide cost savings. As a result of this, investing in nurse-led models of care has a high potential return on investment, making it a sensible business decision for health care systems seeking value for money.

➔ **Further information:**

- [ICN Position Statement – Nursing Regulation](#)

¹ Full practice authority refers to APNs being able to use their knowledge, skills and attributes to the full extent of their education and experience. This requires country authorisation to allow nurse practitioners to evaluate patients, diagnose, order and interpret diagnostic tests, initiate and manage treatments—including prescribe medications—under the exclusive licensure authority of the nursing regulator.

80%
of nurses

stated that they were over-skilled for the roles they were performing resulting in a sense of underappreciation and poor job satisfaction (OECD, 2021b).

Build clinical career pathways to support nurses working in front line care

For nurses working in frontline care, creating clinical career pathways will offer a well-organised framework for professional development that fosters continual learning, skill development and career promotion. These pathways can be created to fulfil the requirements of particular nurses and to advance their professional objectives, while also taking organisational requirements like retention and recruitment into account. The pathways can be constructed around a number of fundamental components, such as education accomplishment, competency evaluations, learning strategies, mentoring relationships, chances for professional growth and access to continuing professional development.

Empower nursing services with information systems, technology and decision-making tools to enhance patient care and build capacity

Digital technologies offer unique opportunities to strengthen the health system. For example, access to the right information by the right people at the right time can improve the safety, effectiveness, and efficiency of care. Digitally enhanced health services can improve access and aid in the transition from reactive to proactive approaches to health preservation. Nurses could be relieved of time-consuming routine tasks and interact more effectively with patients. Patients could become more engaged, improve their self-care skills, and more effectively coproduce health. Despite the many benefits that digital technologies offer to nursing and health care, the health sector is a long way behind other industries in realising the opportunities (Socha-Dietrich, 2020). In addition, there are many barriers to empowering nursing services with digital technologies. This includes limited resources, inadequate training, resistance to change, insufficient engagement, and concerns about data

security and privacy. To overcome these barriers, health care organisations must invest in the necessary infrastructure, provide comprehensive training to nursing staff, involve nurses in the decision-making process, the utilisation of standardised nursing nomenclature (e.g. ICNP), and establish protocols for data security and privacy.

Actively support and invest in nursing and Advanced Practice Nursing (APN) roles across the continuum of care with a key focus on health and well-being

Individuals' and communities' health and well-being are highly dependent on accessible and affordable quality health systems. Nonetheless, traditional health care systems are often highly fragmented and concentrated on treating illness and disease, rather than preventing them. Hence, health care systems must reorientate their models of care based on the principles of integrated people-centred care to ensure everybody has access to health services across the continuum of care that is responsive, coordinated and in line with people's needs throughout their life (WHO, 2018). Better health outcomes, improved well-being and improved quality of life are all directly correlated to strong primary care and public health services that are integrated with hospital services. These improvements have significant positive effects on the economy, society and individuals. Integrated people-centred care helps improve access to services, fewer avoidable hospitalisations and readmissions, and better treatment compliance.

Nurses are well placed due to their education, role and the respect they have earned to contribute to and lead the transformative changes that are required for integrated people-centred care across the continuum. But these changes will require a fresh focus on care coordination, data analytics and quality improvement along with a new or improved set of wellness and population care knowledge, skills and attitudes. Most importantly, however, is the transition from siloed independent physicians to engaged and connected multidisciplinary teams that partner with patients and their families.

Value for money
A worksite clinic run by a single Nurse Practitioner in the USA resulted in direct medical care cost-savings of nearly \$2.18 million over a two-year period, not including indirect savings related to lost productivity and absences (Chenoweth et al., 2008).

One of the ways that this is achieved is through nurse-led models of care. For example, studies show that nurse-led clinics result in improving value such as avoiding costly mistakes and readmissions, keeping patients healthy, reducing waste, avoiding duplicative care, appropriately using specialists' time, and improved coordination of care. However, for these benefits to be realised, there is a need for a multi-disciplinary/trans-disciplinary approach; comprehensive planning and scoping prior to implementation of the model of care or clinic; administrative support; and support from other colleagues and health professionals.

► **Further information:**

- [ICN Guidelines on Advanced Practice Nursing](#)
- [ICN Guidelines on Prescriptive Authority for Nurses](#)

1 in 4
patients suffering
from chronic disease
conditions

did not receive any of
the recommended preventive tests
in the previous 12 months
(OECD, 2020).

Conclusion

Reorienting and integrating health systems towards primary care, community and home-based care, public health, and patient-centred care is necessary to providing optimal health care services. To effectively deploy human resources, this calls for strong leadership and the redesign of roles and models of care. Health practitioners are the most valuable asset that health systems possess. Nevertheless, all too frequently, health professionals do not utilise their knowledge, abilities and talents to the fullest extent possible. Millions of dollars are lost instead because human resources are not used to their full potential. Money can be saved, and health professionals' satisfaction will increase with better human resource management.

Health care institutions must also recognise the need to address health disparities and provide culturally competent care to underserved areas. Health care organisations can make sure that everyone has access to high-quality health care services that suit their individual needs and preferences through collaborating with communities and health care experts.

7

Recognise and value nurses' skills, knowledge, attributes and expertise

Our Nurses.

Our Future.

Recognise and value nurses' skills, knowledge, attributes and expertise. Respect and promote nurses' roles as health professionals, scientists, researchers, educators and leaders. Involve nurses in decision-making affecting health care at all levels. Promote and invest in an equitable culture that respects the nursing profession as leading contributors to high quality health systems.



As major players in the delivery of health care, nurses are essential to the provision and coordination of care, the prevention of adverse events and the improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of health services (Aike *et al.*, 2017). Beyond providing safe care that is in line with the best available evidence and clinical standards, nurses also have obligations to participate in larger organisational and systemic quality and safety systems. In order to inform changes in health care quality, nurses have a professional obligation to evaluate, monitor and report on the appropriateness and efficacy of care and advance scientific research. They are crucial in the development, use and assessment of eHealth applications that increase patient safety, and they take part in the safe design and operation of facilities, tools and work procedures. Duties include person-centred care through systems and processes that encourage shared decision-making, continuity of care, open disclosure, and sensitivity to the cultural needs and health literacy of patients. Nurses also promote, engage with, and utilise research evidence to enhance the safety and quality of treatment, as well as exhibit clinical leadership (Oldland *et al.*, 2020).

**Nursing is
a demanding
and complex
profession that is
vital to the health
and wellbeing of
communities.**

As demonstrated above, nursing is a demanding and complex profession that is vital to the health and well-being of communities. In general, nurses are viewed by the public as a highly trusted and essential profession. The truth is that only a small percentage of people are aware of the wide range of duties and responsibilities that modern nurses have, and as a result, they do not fully comprehend the exceptional value that nursing provides to every person on the globe. Poor understanding of the roles of nurses is expressed in a variety of negative ways. This includes being seen as 'subordinate' to physicians; limited voice at the decision-making table; inadequate remuneration; blamed for poor outcomes and dysfunctional systems; and worst of all violence against them. This gross undervaluing of nurses leads to poor motivation, resentment and increased intention to leave whilst at the same time making it an unattractive career choice. Action must be taken to demonstrate appreciation and the valuing of nursing skills, knowledge, attributes and expertise.

Improve the public image of the nursing profession

Improving the public image of nursing requires a multifaceted approach that involves collaboration among nurses, health care organisations, educational institutions, and the media.

- Increase public awareness of the roles and responsibilities of nurses is essential to help people understand the vital role that nurses play in health care. Nurses are prepared for a variety of roles through baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral degree programmes. Nursing theories, clinical sciences, conceptual models, research, and theory testing are all part of the education that nurses receive. The general public needs to be made aware of the existence and value of nursing education and research in promoting and protecting patient health. This awareness will, in turn, improve the public perception of nursing and empower nurses (ten Hoeve, Jansen & Roodbol, 2014).
- Collaborate with media to challenge stereotypes and misinformation about nursing. Encourage accurate, well-researched portrayals of nurses and their roles in TV shows, movies, and news stories.
- Celebrate nursing achievements such as successful initiatives and research.

- Develop and support strong nursing leaders. Encourage and invest in nurses to pursue leadership roles within health care organisations, professional associations and government bodies. Strong leaders can advocate for the profession and can improve public appreciation and perception.
- Foster interprofessional collaboration to promote a culture of respect.
- Encourage nurse mentorship programmes to empower the next generation of nurses.

Involve nurses in decision-making related to health care policies, procedures and guidelines

Despite the critical role nurses play in health care, they are often excluded from decision-making processes that affect patient care and outcomes. This exclusion not only undervalues the contributions of nurses but can also lead to suboptimal patient outcomes. Health care organisations can gain from the knowledge and distinct perspective of nurses by including them in decision-making processes. The demands of patients and their families, the impact of health care policy, and the practicalities of patient care are all topics that nurses are well positioned to discuss. Also,

they can offer insightful input on the application of novel techniques and procedures, assuring their effectiveness and efficiency (Salmond & Echevarria, 2017).

In addition to improvements to the health care system, integrating nurses in decision-making may improve employee retention and job satisfaction. Higher job satisfaction and retention rates are the results of nurses feeling appreciated and involved in decision-making processes. These nurses are also more likely to be engaged and committed to their profession. In turn, this can reduce nurses' intention to leave the profession leading to workforce shortages.

One of the ultimate benefits for health systems is that involving nurses in decision-making can lead to increased cost-effectiveness. Nurses are well positioned to provide feedback on the use of health care resources and can identify opportunities to reduce waste and inefficiencies. By involving nurses in decision-making, health care organisations can ensure that resources are used in the most effective and efficient way possible, leading to cost savings and increased value for money.

Ensure fair pay and benefits as a mark of respect to nurses

To appreciate and esteem nurses, fair compensation and benefits are necessary. In addition to working long hours, often on weekends and holidays, nurses are routinely placed in trying and difficult circumstances. In spite of this, many nurses work for little pay, which can cause burnout and workforce shortages of nurses. It is crucial to pay nurses a competitive wage that recognises their abilities and the value of their work. Their pay should be in line with their qualifications, responsibilities and experience. In order to give nurses financial security and a balance between their personal and professional lives, benefits like health insurance, retirement plans and paid time off are also crucial. These rewards can help recruit and keep talented nurses while demonstrating the value of their work.

Studies have shown that greater compensation and financial incentives rarely have the effect on performance that is sought when used alone. The provision of sufficient resources, assistance with logistics, and investment in continuing education and conferences are all examples of valuing the contribution of nurses (Stewart *et al.*, 2022).

Guarantee safe and decent working conditions to care for the carers

It is essential to demonstrate respect and appreciation for nurses by providing them with working circumstances that are safe and decent. Because of their work, nurses are exposed to a wide range of occupational hazards. They are particularly vulnerable to infectious diseases and injuries, including musculoskeletal injuries, and needlestick injuries. They also are subject to hazards such as stress, shift work and violence in the workplace. These typically fall under

the broad categories of chemical, biological, physical and psychosocial hazards. It is critical to protect the physical and emotional health of nurses by providing them with a working environment that is safe with access to quality and appropriate safety equipment to minimise and mitigate the risks associated with occupational hazards (IntraHealth, 2022).

In addition to having safe and decent working conditions, it is essential that respect is shown for the profession by enabling a healthy working environment. A healthy nurse work environment is a workplace that is safe, empowering and satisfying. A positive work environment for nurses is vital to ensure that patients receive high-quality care, as it helps to increase nurse satisfaction, retention and performance. Better working conditions result in happier nurses, who then have better performance and provide better patient care, improving the financial viability of health care organisations (Wei, 2018). It takes constant efforts to promote a healthy work atmosphere. As Mark Britnell states, "How can people deliver compassionate care if they are not cared for too?"

Conclusion

Recognising and valuing nurses' roles as health professionals, scientists, researchers, educators and leaders is essential for the health care sector's success. By involving nurses in decision-making and promoting their expertise and contributions, countries can ensure the provision of quality care to patients and improve the health care system's overall effectiveness.



Engage national nursing associations as professional partners

Our Nurses.

Our Future.

Actively and meaningfully engage national nursing associations as critical professional partners in all aspects of health and social care policy, delivery and leadership as the experienced and trusted voice of nursing. Build local, national and global multilateral partnerships.



Nurses form over half of the world's health care workforce and deliver the majority of hands-on patient care, providing essential services and support to individuals and communities in need. As the largest health profession in nearly all care environments in all countries, nurses will be the critical success factor in rebuilding health services post-pandemic (Buchan & Catton, 2023).

As representatives of the nursing profession, NNAs hold valuable insights and expertise of nursing practice and the challenges faced by health care professionals. As a result, NNAs can provide invaluable contributions to the development and implementation of effective health and nursing policies.

Being the knowledgeable and dependable voice of nursing, NNAs are essential professional partners to governments, policy makers, educators and health care professionals in all facets of health and social care policy, delivery and leadership. NNAs' main responsibility is to advocate for improved health outcomes while fostering respect, support and understanding for the nursing profession.

Strong NNAs are vital to healthy communities, high-performing health systems and the advancement and evolution of the profession (Matthews, 2021; Crumley, 2020).

- Promoting high standards of care: NNAs establish and maintain high standards of care within the

Strong NNAs are vital to healthy communities, highperforming health systems and the advancement and evolution of the profession.

nursing profession. They accomplish this through a combination of continuing education programmes, certification opportunities, and adherence to the nursing code of ethics. By providing nurses with the necessary resources to enhance their skills, NNAs ensure that patients receive the highest quality of care possible.

- The voice of nursing: One of the primary functions of NNAs is to advocate for the nursing profession and for patients. These organisations represent the interests of nurses in various settings, including government agencies, legislative bodies and other health care institutions. By lobbying for pro-nurse policies and regulations, these organisations work to improve the overall work environment for nurses, which can lead to better patient outcomes.
- Research and evidence-based practice: NNAs play a vital role in promoting research and evidence-based practice within the nursing profession. They assist in keeping nurses informed of the latest research findings and best practices, ensuring that they are well equipped to provide the best possible care.
- Public education and awareness: NNAs work to raise public awareness about the role and importance of the nursing profession. This contributes to a more positive perception of the profession and helps attract new talent to the profession.

Actively engage with NNAs to progress health and social policies

NNAs are representatives of the nursing profession. Countries and health systems should actively engage with NNAs in relation to health and social policies as they can benefit from the valuable insights and perspectives of nurses. This will ensure that these policies are better aligned to the needs of patients, communities and health care professionals. Ways in which this can be achieved include:

- involving NNAs in committees and working groups to address specific health and health care issues;
- including NNA representatives in key policy meetings and forums;
- encouraging NNAs to actively contribute to policy proposals and recommendations by providing them with the opportunity to submit new proposals and formally review proposed policies and plans;
- supporting the facilitation of partnerships between NNAs, education providers, Ministries of Health, regulators and other health care organisations;
- collaborating and supporting NNAs in the development and implementation of professional development programmes to enhance nursing knowledge, skills and attributes;
- supporting NNAs in organising conferences and symposiums to progress standards of practice for nursing.

NNAs to build and strengthen multilateral partnerships

Collaboration between NNAs from other nations or regions is referred to as a multilateral cooperation, and it can give health care professionals and organisations a greater understanding of health care practices and policies that affect the region and the world. The global health landscape is facing numerous challenges that require the concerted effort of countries worldwide. With the increasing prevalence of infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases and health inequities, it is important for NNAs to collaborate in order to develop effective and sustainable solutions. By sharing knowledge, resources and expertise, NNAs can support the creation of innovative strategies to address these complex issues. This collaboration between NNAs can help strengthen health systems, reduce disparities and enhance global health security. Ultimately, NNAs working together is the key to overcoming shared health challenges and improving the well-being of people around the world. This can be achieved through:

- fostering international collaboration by establishing formal partnerships with the International Council of Nurses and actively engaging in participation in activities;
- collaborating with regional and global organisations like the World Health Organization and regional bodies;
- participating in global forums such as the Triad (ICN – ICM – WHO) meetings, regulation and credentialing forums and NNA meetings, attending and contributing to ICN Congresses and Council of NNA Representatives (CNR);
- building relationships with non-governmental organisations and civil society groups and work together to address complex health challenges;
- establishing communication channels for ongoing collaboration; this may occur through the sharing of information through online platforms, newsletters and social media;
- establishing Regional Nursing Forums (e.g. South Pacific Nursing Forum).

Conclusion

NNAs play a critical role in the development and implementation of effective health and nursing policies. As representatives of the nursing profession, NNAs hold valuable insights and expertise in nursing practice and the challenges faced by health care professionals. By promoting high standards of care, advocating for the nursing profession and patients, promoting research and evidence-based practice, and raising public awareness, NNAs contribute to healthy communities, high-performing health systems and the advancement and evolution of the nursing profession. Furthermore, actively engaging with NNAs and building multilateral partnerships can benefit countries and health systems by aligning policies with the needs of patients, communities and health care professionals, and by developing innovative strategies to address complex health challenges. Ultimately, NNAs working together is key to overcoming shared health challenges and improving the well-being of people around the world.

9

Protect vulnerable populations, uphold and respect human rights, gender equity and social justice

Our Nurses.

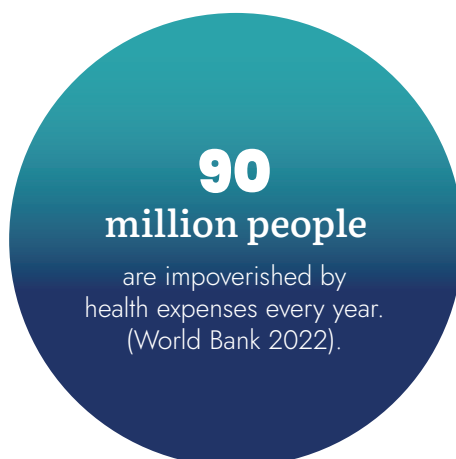
Our Future.

Protect vulnerable populations, uphold and respect human rights, gender equity and social justice. Place and uphold nursing ethics at the centre of health systems' design and delivery so all people can access health care that is equitable, non-discriminatory, people-centred and rights based, and without the risk of financial hardship.



The world today is characterised by numerous challenges, including growing disparities in income and access to resources, conflict, political instability and divide, and discrimination against certain groups. This has led to a pressing need for the protection of vulnerable populations and the upholding of human rights, gender equity and social justice. Health care, as a fundamental human right, is a key domain in which these principles must be upheld.

Vulnerable populations are often marginalised and face significant barriers in accessing health care services. The promotion of equity, social justice and respect for human rights are fundamental principles of nursing ethics. Nurses play a vital



role in ensuring that these principles are upheld in health systems' design and delivery to provide equitable and non-discriminatory care to all patients. Vulnerable populations are those who are at greater risk of experiencing adverse health outcomes due to social, economic, and political factors.

One way to protect vulnerable populations is by promoting health equity. This can be achieved by addressing the root causes of health disparities such as poverty, discrimination and lack of access to health care. Nurses can advocate for policy changes that address these issues and ensure

that health care services are accessible to all.

Uphold, respect and advocate for human rights

The 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights will be celebrated in December 2023. This sentinel declaration was a milestone document in the history of human rights. Drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world, it set out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected. The Universal Declaration provides the impetus and authority to transform the world through the power of ideas. It motivates people around the world to keep fighting for everyone's right to freedom, equality, and dignity (United Nations, n.d.).

ICN endorses this declaration and views "health care as a right of all individuals, that is available, affordable and culturally acceptable, regardless of financial, social, political, geographic, racial or religious considerations." ICN (ICN, 2021) also clearly states that "all human rights are interdependent and indivisible, and that individuals' health and wellbeing can be harmed when their human rights in any category are violated." As a result, we call on nations to adhere to, uphold and advocate for human rights.

Nurses have a code of ethics and an obligation to safeguard, respect and actively promote people's health rights at all times and in all places. Nurses themselves also have rights. They have the right to practice in an atmosphere that is safe, free from abuse, aggression, threats or intimidation,

and where there is no fear of reprisal. Individually and collectively through their NNAs, nurses have a responsibility to report and speak out when there are human rights violations, particularly those involving patient safety, access to basic health care, and/or torture and other cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment (ICN, 2011).

Countries and health systems can (WHO, 2022a):

- recognise and adhere to obligations that ensure timely, acceptable and affordable health care;
- allocate "maximum available resources" to progressively realise these goals;
- review regulations and policies to ensure that they adhere to equality and human rights;
- prioritise health care to those most in need;
- promote participation of nurses and nursing associations in the assessment, planning, development, implementation and evaluation of health regulations, policies and plans;
- adhere to and promote the International Labour Organization's Resolution on "a safe and healthy working environment" (ILO, 2022).

► Further information:

- [ICN Position Statement – Nurses and Human Rights](#)
- [ILO Resolution on the inclusion of a safe and healthy working environment in the ILO's framework of fundamental principles and rights at work](#)
- [United Nations – Human Rights 75 Campaign](#)
- [WHO – Human Rights](#)

Promote gender equity and social justice

Gender equity and social justice are essential for the fulfillment of human rights and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Ensuring equal opportunities for all, irrespective of gender, is vital in reducing poverty, promoting economic growth and fostering social cohesion. In this context, nurses play a crucial role, as they have the potential to address the social determinants of health and work towards a more equitable and just society.

Nurses have a key role in progressing gender equity and social justice by:

- Addressing health disparities: Nurses can identify and address gender-based health disparities; as highly trusted health professionals, nurses can enhance health outcomes by advocating for equal health care access.
- Providing holistic care: Optimal nursing practice treats each person respectfully as an individual human being, and not just a condition to be treated. As a result, nurses take into consideration the physical, emotional and social needs of their patients. Nurses are well placed to understand the experiences and challenges faced by patients which can be used to improve care and enable shared decision-making (Christine & Kaldjian, 2013).

Countries and health systems can support and enable nurses to advance gender equity and social justice by:

- including social determinants of health in education programmes and continuing professional development;
- actively engaging with nurses and NNAs to develop policies and initiatives aimed at addressing the social determinants of health; and
- promoting interprofessional collaboration between health care professionals, social workers, community health workers and community leaders to develop and implement strategies for addressing the social determinants of health.

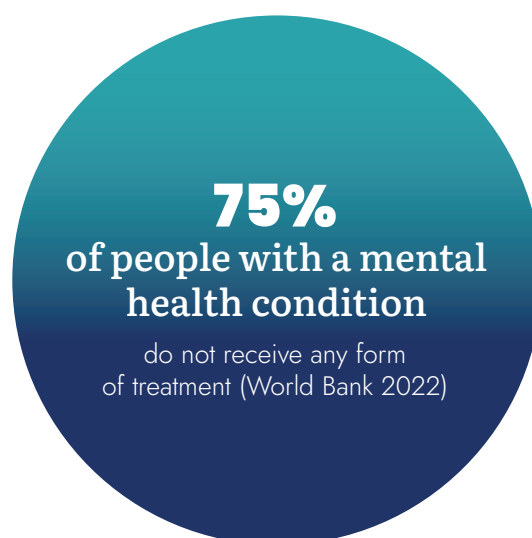
► Further information:

- [ICN Nurses: A Voice to Lead – Nurses' role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals](#)

Nurses are well placed to understand the experiences and challenges faced by patients which can be used to improve care and enable shared decision-making.

Place nursing ethics at the centre of health systems' design and delivery

Nursing ethics is a set of values and principles that guide the actions of nurses in their practice. These include respect for human rights and dignity; respecting patients' rights to make informed decisions about their care and treatment; actively promoting the well-being of patients and taking actions to benefit their health; ensuring that their interventions do not cause harm or suffering to patients; treating all patients fairly and equitably without discrimination; communicating honestly and transparently with patients and other health professionals; upholding trust; and promoting social justice. By placing nursing ethics at the centre of health systems' design and delivery, nurses can ensure that all patients receive equitable and non-discriminatory care that is people-centred and rights-based. It is essential as it supports the maintaining of the profession's standards and fosters trust between nurses, patients and the community.



As a result, it contributes to the overall integrity and effectiveness of the health care system. Countries and health systems can support the integration of nursing ethics in various ways (ICN, 2021):

- develop and implement policies and legislation that uphold nursing ethics, patient rights and professional standards: this includes creating frameworks for ethical decision-making, confidentiality and informed consent;
- incorporate ethics education into nursing curricula and continuous professional development programmes; ensure that nursing students and practicing nurses receive comprehensive education in ethical principles and their application in clinical practice;

- ensure nurses are included as equal participants on hospital ethics committees; this will provide guidance and support for nurses in addressing ethical dilemmas, promote human rights, and support the development of policies that increase access to and equality of care;
- offer resources and counselling to nurses who have suffered from moral injury;
- promote interdisciplinary collaboration to foster a shared understanding of ethical principles and their importance in patient care;
- invest in nurse researchers to ensure best practices are undertaken in the area of ethics and human rights;
- engage with nurse leaders to develop policies and guidelines that actively address human rights and the social determinants of health;
- monitor and evaluate ethics in health care practices; use the information collected to inform policy development, education and professional standards.

► **Further information:**

- ICN – The ICN Code of Ethics for Nurses - https://www.icn.ch/system/files/2021-10/ICN_Code-of-Ethics_EN_Web_0.pdf

Conclusion

The need to protect vulnerable populations, uphold and respect human rights, and promote gender equity and social justice is more pressing than ever. By placing nursing ethics at the centre of health systems' design and delivery, we can create more equitable, just and inclusive health care environments. This, in turn, contributes to the overall well-being of individuals and communities, fostering a more compassionate and resilient society.

10

Appoint nurse leaders to executive positions

Appoint nurse leaders to executive positions of all health care organisations and government policy making. Strengthen nursing leadership throughout health systems and create and sustain nursing leadership roles where they are most needed.

Our Nurses.

Our Future.



The appointment of nurse leaders to executive positions in health care organisations and government policy-making is crucial to address the challenges faced by the health care sector. These challenges include the high number and cost of medical errors, a fragmented health care system, the misuse of health care and human resources, the rapidly escalating demand for care, growing community expectations and a global workforce shortage crisis (Stewart *et al.*, 2022). Whilst these problems exist, they do provide opportunities for positive transformation and as research currently demonstrates, appropriately qualified nurse leaders have been shown to be critical in addressing them.

The appointment of nurse leaders to executive positions in health care organisations and government policy-making is crucial to address the challenges faced by the health care sector.

Despite the benefits that nurse leaders can bring, there are many health systems that are either not employing nurse executives or not adequately resourcing the positions. The lack of executive nurse leaders in health care systems can be attributed to a combination of historical underinvestment, perception of nursing, lack of education and career pathways, budget constraints, resistance to change, and lack of diversity and inclusion. Addressing these challenges will require a concerted effort from health care organisations, policy-makers and nursing leaders.

Increase the visibility of nurse leaders

Nurses have the potential to be transformational leaders given their unique body of knowledge, skills and education. Yet, the innovation and leadership skills of nurses have generally remained an underutilised resource for the health care system and, consequently, patients. This is evidenced by the fact that nurses are rarely promoted to positions of authority and are historically under-represented on hospital and health service boards and within ministries of health where health care decisions that affect the health of patients and communities are made (Stewart *et al.*, 2022; Hughes, Carryer & White, 2015; Hajizadeh *et al.*, 2021). This lack of representation means that nurses who are responsible for policy and strategy implementation have not been involved in their development resulting in sub-optimal and sometimes costly decisions.

To overcome this obstacle and highlight the strategic value that nurses contribute to leadership roles, it is crucial to raise their profile. This includes:

- recognising, including and hearing nurses as equal partners with other stakeholders in the policy formation process;
- nominating and elevating competent nurse leaders with the right credentials to national leadership positions;
- supporting and enabling senior nurses to engage with the media and policy makers in engaging with the public on key matters of health;
- promoting nurse leaders by emphasising their achievements, highlighting their leadership qualities, and sharing their success stories; this can be accomplished by public recognition, speaking engagements and media coverage;

- Appoint and provide sufficient resourcing to Chief Nursing Officers in Ministries of Health and Executive Directors of nursing in health care organisations.
- Include Government Chief Nursing Officers in delegations to international fora, such as the World Health Assembly.

► **Further information:**

- [ICN Briefing - Government Chief Nursing Officer \(GCNO\) Positions](#)
- [WHO - Roles and responsibilities of government chief nursing and midwifery officers: A Capacity-Building Manual](#)

Support the authority and empowerment of nurse leaders

Since the interests of management, staff and patients all have competing interests, the complexity of the health care environment puts additional pressure on the nurse's leadership role. Financial restrictions, shifting government regulations and policies, rising consumer expectations, advances in science and technology, and keeping up with shifting health care practices all necessitate that nurse leaders have the necessary levels of authority and ability to perform the duties of their position. In addition, as budgets become increasingly fiscally constrained, nurse leaders are being asked to have greater spans of control and increased accountability for their decisions. It is important that increased roles and accountability are matched with an equal level of power and authority (Hughes, Carryer & White, 2015).

However, the ability to lead change and drive strategy is often hampered by several factors including (i) indirect lines of reporting to the Director General or Chief Executive Officer; (ii) lack of inclusion and influence in high level decision-making; and (iii) limited resourcing and financial responsibilities (Hughes, Carryer & White, 2015). To optimise the roles and responsibilities of nurse leaders requires (Hughes, Carryer & White, 2015):

- having the power and authority to mobilise resources that are required to meet the demands of the work environment;
- direct lines of reporting to highest level of decision-making such as the Director General or Chief Executive Officer;
- engagement and involvement in high level decision-making and policy tables;
- visibility of actions and outcomes directly related to the work; and
- sufficient financial responsibilities and budget to undertake actions required to improve the delivery of health care.

In order for nurse leaders to be empowered and capable of making the necessary adjustments in a changing environment that supports the provision of effective, high-quality health care, their structural placement is crucial. The level of legitimacy and authority of nurse leaders will increase as a result of increasing the visibility of nursing leadership through stronger reporting lines and budgetary systems.

Ensure opportunities for nurses to access leadership development programmes, higher education and other professional development

Senior nursing executives have extremely complex roles in health care and their impact on health systems performance can be extremely profound. They are crucial for developing and aligning missions, values, culture and policies of their health systems or organisations with nursing care. In addition, they are often responsible for managing resources, organising nursing care, planning and evaluating services and contributing to the overall development of the health system. All of this requires a level of competence that sometimes extends beyond the traditional fields of nursing. For example, systematic reviews (Hajizadeh *et al.*, 2021) have identified insufficient knowledge of the health policy making process as one of the important reasons for not becoming involved in health policy making.

Health systems should develop leadership development programmes to prepare nurses for executive positions. These educational opportunities can provide nurses with the necessary competencies to make evidenced-based decisions, engage stakeholders, address emerging health challenges and drive change. By investing in education and leadership development programmes for policymakers in health policy, governments, institutions and individuals can promote better health outcomes for all.

Key considerations for the development of nurse executives include:

- Incentivise post graduate education and attainment of core competencies in leadership: Postgraduate education can provide nurse executives with the competencies required to meet the challenges of modern health systems (González García *et al.*, 2022).
- Support mentorship programmes: Health care organisations should develop mentorship programmes that pair nurse leaders with emerging nurse leaders. These programmes can provide valuable guidance and support to emerging nurse leaders, helping them to develop the skills necessary to advance into leadership positions. In addition, institutions should identify nurses for the Global Nursing Leadership Institute™ or other national nurse leadership programmes offered by NNAs.
- Invest in professional development opportunities: Health care organisations should support and invest in professional development opportunities for nurse leaders, including leadership training, continuing education and networking opportunities. These opportunities can help nurse leaders to stay current on industry trends, latest research and best practices and provide opportunities to connect with other nursing leaders.

► Further information:

- [International Council of Nurses Global Nursing Leadership Institute](#)
- [Nursing Now, IntraHealth & Johnson & Johnson, Investing in the power of nurse leadership what will it take?](#)

Conclusion

The appointment of nurse leaders in executive positions across health care organisations and government policymaking is vital for addressing the complex challenges faced by the health system. Increasing the visibility of nurse leaders, supporting their authority and empowerment through providing sufficient resources, and ensuring opportunities for leadership development, higher education and professional development are essential steps to optimise the impact of nursing leadership on health systems. By recognising and utilising the unique knowledge, skills and education of nurse leaders and NNAs, health care organisations and policymakers can drive positive transformation, ultimately leading to improved patient outcomes and overall health care system performance.

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